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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000225

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TAGS: PGOV PREL EINV EI

SUBJECT: IRELAND EYES DEVOLUTION OF POLICING AND JUSTICE
CALMLY; WELCOMES COLLABORATION WITH U.S. ON NORTH-SOUTH
INITIATIVES

REF: DUBLIN 188

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Classified By: DCM Rob Faucher; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶11. (C) Pat Hennessy, Director General, Anglo-Irish Division, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), told EMBOFFs on April 24 that while the issue of devolution of policing and justice in Northern Ireland clearly provides potential for damaging the political rapprochement that has been growing between Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), he believed that the two parties would continue to negotiate and eventually reach agreement. Hennessy assured EMBOFFs that Brian Cowen, who will be appointed Irish Taoiseach on May 7, will participate in the U.S. supported investment conference in Northern Ireland, May 7-9. Hennessy invited EMBOFFs to meet in late May to develop a framework to enhance joint U.S.-Irish collaboration in support of North-South initiatives. End summary.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

¶12. (C) Hennessy, the senior-most person in the Irish DFA working full-time on matters relating to Northern Ireland, described the workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) as "businesslike," with much useful discussion taking place behind the scenes on contentious issues like the devolution of policing and justice. He said that the Irish Government is taking a firm stand that devolution of policing and justice to the NIA must take place as agreed in the St. Andrews Agreement, which evolved from the Good Friday Agreement (Ref A). However, Hennessy indicated that Ireland is not insisting that devolution be achieved in May 2008 as envisaged in the St. Andrews Agreement. Rather, he said, by the end of May the Irish Government would like to see an agreement reached by Sinn Fein and the DUP in regards to a timeframe for devolution. Hennessy indicated that May could become a flashpoint for inter-party recriminations as the DUP tries to gradually persuade its constituents to accept that Sinn Fein will have a say in future policing and justice issues, while Sinn Fein tries to explain to its constituents why the DUP is not honoring a promise Sinn Fein thought was made at St. Andrews in October 2006 to devolve policing and justice by May 2008. Hennessy did not have any immediate solutions to offer, except to say that he thought the two sides would continue to talk -- and eventually resolve -- this contentious issue.

¶3. (C) Subsequently, POLOFF discussed the devolution issue with Rita O'Hare, Secretary General of Sinn Fein. O'Hare acknowledged the difficulty faced by DUP leader-designate Peter Robinson in ensuring that the DUP rank and file feel confident in sharing policing power with Sinn Fein. She noted that it was particularly difficult for Robinson to convince Deputy DUP leader Nigel Dodds (who is Minister of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment in the NIA, and regarded as a hard-liner) to support devolution and bring his constituents around. While she indicated that Sinn Fein could live with the actual date of devolution slipping past May (as has occurred with virtually every past "deadline" between Sinn Fein and the DUP), she mused that it would be a "huge problem" for Sinn Fein if the parties moved into June with no perceptible agreement on devolution.

Northern Ireland Leadership

¶4. (C) Hennessy described Northern Ireland First Minister-designate Peter Robinson as a moderate DUP leader, with whom the Irish Government can easily work. He said that the relationship between Robinson and Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister)-designate Brian Cowen was excellent, noting that they had worked together well as Ministers of Finance in their respective states and seemed to genuinely like each other. He commented, however, that DUP leader Nigel Dodds was continuing to resist cooperation with the Irish Government on North-South initiatives, having maintained for many years that the Government of Ireland supported the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and sought to subjugate the unionist communities of Northern Ireland.

Investment Conference

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¶5. (SBU) Hennessy expressed delight that the upcoming U.S. supported May 7-9 investment conference had gained so much momentum. He attributed this largely to the strong promotion of the conference by the U.S. Government. Hennessy assured EMBOFFs that Brian Cowen, who will be appointed Irish Taoiseach on May 7, will participate in the conference -- virtually his first duty as Taoiseach. UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown will also participate. The conference will be headlined by a U.S. Presidential delegation, led by Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky, and will include New York City

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Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the CEOs of more than 90 U.S. firms.

North-South Cooperation

¶6. (SBU) Hennessy briefly described some of the more successful on-going North-South cooperative ventures, which are designed to create stronger political, economic, and social links between Ireland and Northern Ireland. He invited EMBOFFs to meet with him in late May to develop a framework that will strengthen joint U.S.-Irish collaboration on North-South initiatives, particularly in areas such as research and development, community reconciliation, education, and urban renewal -- in addition, of course, to trade and investment.

Comment

¶7. (C) While the issue of devolution of policing and justice clearly provides potential for damaging the political

rapprochement that has been growing between Sinn Fein and the DUP, neither Hennessy nor O'Hare appeared anywhere close to panic. They seemed to feel that the leadership changes in Ireland, the DUP, and the UK provide a credible rationale for slippage of the May 2008 "deadline." Nonetheless, the Irish Government intends to push hard for devolution to occur as soon as possible, and we expect this issue to figure prominently in outgoing Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's address to a Joint Session of Congress on April 30 in Washington, DC. In the meantime, we have agreed with Hennessy to meet later in May to develop a framework for joint U.S.-Irish collaboration in support of North-South initiatives.

FAUCHER